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SENSITIVE
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FOR SOUTHCOM GENERAL FRASER AND ACTING OFDA DIRECTOR CHAN FROM CHARGE D' AFFAIRES

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SUBJECT: El Salvador: Building on Our Disaster Relief Successes

REF: 09 SAN SALVADOR 1057

11. (U) Above all, I want this message to convey Embassy San Salvador's appreciation for AID/OFDA's and Southcom's swift, effective and professional response to El Salvador's flooding and mudslides, caused by Tropical Storm Ida. A quick chronology:

* The storm's damage was inflicted on the weekend of Nov. 7-8.

* By Monday, November 9 we already had OFDA on the ground assessing the damage, with enough to justify our sending a disaster declaration message.

* By Tuesday, November 10 we had the answer to that message and a fast 100K in hand that our extraordinarily effective Mission Disaster Relief Officer used to buy emergency supplies. We also had a JTF-Bravo advance team with us to plan military missions in response to President Funes's letter asking for engineering and helicopter lift capabilities.

* Wednesday, November 11 (Veterans Day) marked the arrival of a cargo plane with more USAID emergency supplies, plus interim approval for JTF-Bravo to carry out a broad spectrum of disaster-relief missions.

* Thursday, November 12, four JTF-B helos were deployed at the Salvadoran Air Base at Ilopango, and missions were underway, delivering emergency relief to remote areas, unreachable by land, as access roads and/or bridges had been washed out by the storm. These missions saved lives.

* The missions continued for roughly another week and a half, augmented by engineering assessments, medical and other humanitarian assistance projects.

12. (SBU) Although other countries and international organizations, as well as private charities joined the effort to help the victims of Tropical Storm Ida, OFDA and Southcom assistance clearly made the most impact. On November 16, USAID Mission Director and A/DCM Larry Brady attended a donor coordination meeting at which some 40-50 participants announced their pledges and shipments of emergency aid. The AID Director was the only one able to say that assistance from his country was already delivered to the most hard-hit areas, and that the USG would assist with the delivery of other countries' aid, in coordination with Salvadoran authorities. Media coverage of the U.S. assistance effort was thorough, including some editorial praise from one of the key newspapers.

13. (SBU) Southcom Military Deputy Commander LTG Keen's Nov. 18-19 visit served to highlight the value of USG disaster

assistance and reinforce the already strong mil-to-mil relationship with the Salvadoran armed forces. General Keen and Salvadoran Defense Minister Munguiya Payes on November 19 led a ceremony at Ilopango Air Base that recognized the contributions of servicemen from both countries. The ceremony included a video prepared by the Salvadoran Air Force that showed their own Search-and-Rescue missions on the first few days of the natural disaster, and then highlighted the crucial role played by the JTF-B mission. That segment of the video was introduced by a large caption that read "La Mano Amiga" (the friendly helping hand), followed by footage of the four JTF-B helos in the air. We will send up a copy of that video; it should come with a warning about provoking strong emotions of patriotism and pride in our country. Another key aspect of General Keen's visit was to emphasize a USG "whole-of-government" approach to disaster relief, which had the effect of producing better coordination among the disparate players on the Salvadoran side.

14. (SBU) President Funes, Defense Minister Munguiya-Payes, Foreign Minister Hugo Martinez, Health Minister Maria Isabel Rodriguez, Governance Minister Humberto Centeno, Agriculture Minister Manuel Sevilla, and Public Works Minister Gerson Martinez have thanked us personally and effusively for the U.S. assistance. The latter, a former FMLN guerrilla, will be a key interlocutor for whatever we do to follow up the engineering assessments. He and his staff listened attentively Saturday morning (Nov. 21) to LTC Higdon's briefing on the damaged bridges, and asked for assessments of more bridges.

15. (SBU) Comment and Follow-Up: Although we should certainly be satisfied with what we have done thus far to help the Salvadorans, we cannot say that we are finished. The country is likely to be in recovery mode for the next year-even without factoring in the economic recession. Embassy is currently evaluating the scope of El Salvador's recovery needs and the areas where we believe our ongoing assistance will make the most impact, and not duplicate what others are doing. We will send that up in the next few days, along with estimates of the costs-to be used in requesting supplemental funding from Congress.
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